

## **COMPLAINTS GO BEYOND WEATHER EFFECT CRITICS SAY IT CAUSES BREATHING PROBLEMS**

Front

The controversy over chaff goes beyond the weather:

- \* Watchdog groups argue that chaff's aluminum and fiberglass particles, which are made from silica, may cause cancer. Silica deposits have been linked to gastro-intestinal cancer.

- \* Environmental groups for decades have warned about the possible ill effects of breathing in chaff particles and the potential dangers to wildlife.

- \* Nevada ranches have claimed chaff makes cattle ill. Others, including the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, have expressed an uneasy feeling over the large amounts of chaff that falls on public land and into water systems.

Nowhere has the battle been more intense than in Nevada, where environmentalists estimate trillions of chaff fibers have been dropped in the past 20 years, mostly from jets stationed at Fallon Naval Air Station, 70 miles east of Reno, and Nellis Air Force Base, eight miles north of Las Vegas.

In Arizona, chaff fallout from war games at the Goldwater range near Gila Bend has not generated the same concerns as in Nevada.

The Department of Defense in 1997 issued reports that said there is no reason to believe chaff causes any of the problems raised by its critics.

But critics noted that no one really knows how fiberglass chaff affects humans or wildlife and turned to Nevada U.S. Sen. Harry Reid, requesting a study independent of the military.

Last September, the General Accounting Office, the investigative arm of Congress, issued its own report on chaff.

GAO cited numerous holes in Defense studies, but largely recommended the military take care of its own problems, urging the Defense Department to develop a biodegradable chaff.

Bas Aja, spokesman for the Arizona Cattlemen's Association, said he has not heard of any complaints about military chaff from ranchers in his association.

Rob Smith, local Sierra Club Southwest staff director, said he is familiar with the controversy in Nevada but knows of no movement in Arizona to address similar concerns.

"Activists in Nevada have been on this issue for many years," Smith said, "primarily because some of Nevada's bombing ranges are extremely large and include a lot of overflights up and down valleys populated by lots of ranches."

Mary Jo May, chief of the news bureau at Luke Air Force Base, which manages the Goldwater range, said Luke knows and follows all environmental regulations during war games at Goldwater.

"We understand the environmental impact and we do our cleanup," May said.

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